

## Wax: Stop Motion's Little Known Material 4

Written by Marc Spess

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*A finished wax sculpt by Ralph Cordero, Copyright X-Concepts*

Outside of the first benefits I mentioned in saving time and registration, wax is also ideal as a sculpting material for puppets. Nowadays films like *Corpse Bride* have a very polished look. The puppets are sculpted crisply with minute intricate details. Some sculptors of modern puppets seem to be moving more towards accuracy and sharpness unlike previous films. This is part of the reason the *Corpse Bride* looks almost like a CG film in some respects. Everything is sculpted as cleanly as possible, and is almost texture-less.

Now it's arguable if this is a good thing. To an artist under the direction of a studio, they might require a puppet to have just such a look. Sanded "after baking" Super Sculpey polymer clay and wax are the two main ways ways to achieve a clean look. Chemicals such as Citrusol, heat guns and mini torches can be used to smooth waxes to a high gloss. Sanded Super Sculpey is no match for the degree of smoothness wax can give.

From what I have read and been told, wax does not behave in the same way as clay for sculpting. Armatures are not always used since wax is hard and strong enough to hold up most sculptures. Another thing that is commonly done is to make simple sculptures in regular clay. Then alginate throw-away molds are made and melted wax "using double boilers" is poured into the mold. This saves a lot of time in what is a very slow sculpting process.

Heat is always a factor in sculpting with any type of wax. Toaster ovens, microwave ovens, alcohol lamps, light bulb and foil caves, butane mini-torches and hot water are the main ways to keep your wax sculpt-able.

The exact opposite method is used on waxes when carving fine details with burnisher and wood carving tools. To do this, wax is literally put in the kitchen freezer for several hours. This causes the wax to harden and you can scribe minute lines, eye ball iris details, fine hair and tiny mechanical features.

Smoothing is done with sand paper, heated 3M pads, citrus based solvents, lighter fluids, water, nylon and other fine fabrics, small torches and alcohol lamps.

The three main types of waxes used today in the industry are as follows:

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### Azbro Wax



**Azbro Wax** - Used a lot in the toy industry, works the same as Castilene

You can buy Azbro wax [here](#) and [here](#) .

### Castilene Wax



**Castilene Wax** - Is slightly grainy, comes in three hardnesses. The common hardness to sculpt with is the hard consistency.

You can buy Castilene wax [here](#) .

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**Toxic Papa's Wax** - Ralph Cordero reproduces the old formula which is not as grainy as the other formulas. You need to contact Ralph at [Toxicmama@aim.com](mailto:Toxicmama@aim.com) in order to get some, as he is not a manufacturer of the wax. He makes it in small batches.

Wax Sculpting Tutorials:

There are only a few places to find any real information about sculpting in wax. There is one really great site with a tutorial on sculpting with wax [here](#) .

If your serious about trying out wax for puppet sculptures, check out Adam Beans description of how he makes wax sculptures on the next page.

[Part 3](#) | [Part 5](#)